

Unwanted Organs conference 23rd Sept 2017 – CCT submission

The Churches Conservation Trust care for redundant churches. We were established in 1969 under Pastoral Measure. Churches, along with their chattels and sometimes their congregations and communications are vested to our care by the Church of England. We currently look after 352 churches in England and as the trend of church closure continues, gain at least two more each year.

All of our churches are listed, mostly Grade I, and some are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Our collection - the third largest collection of heritage buildings in the country. Needless to say to this audience, but the parish churches of England are, in themselves works of art, and often treasure houses of world-class art and artefacts.

One of these world class artefacts are the organs in our care. We have everything from defunct, dejected harmoniums to simple reed organs, we have empty organ cases to majestic Grade I listed items.

Of course, the condition, use and level of maintenance varies wildly.

I propose to give a very quick snapshot of organs in our care.

Every year we need to raise £1.5m just to carry out essential repair work. Yes, we gain annual core grant from C of E and the DCMS, however, over 50% of our income is raised through our own fundraising efforts. As such, regrettably, repair and maintenance organs and other chattels such as clocks and bells always come second.

There are in many of our more rural churches organs which lie, unplayed, unmaintained and perhaps now, unplayable.

We have organ projects which began, such as the restoration and relocation of the 1786 Samuel Green small chamber organ at St Marys, East Bradenham. However, shortly after the organ was dismantled, the lead was stripped from the roof. Fundraising efforts have now been prioritised towards the recovering of the roof. The organ, which in 2006 needed £20,000, to be rebuilt now lies in a disassembled heap. Given the lead theft and deterioration of the church structure, it is likely this figure will have increased dramatically.

We have some organs which were vested to us as empty shells with detached consoles, the pipes having been transferred to other churches pre-vesting.

My first live example is from Holy Trinity, Sunderland. This is a Grade I listed building, which is on the buildings at risk register and EN 7 ME.

Inside it has an organ by Alfred Monk of London in 1889. I believe it is the largest surviving work by Monk. Previously, it was housed in the Presbyterian Church on Crouch Hill, London and was moved in Holy Trinity in the 1930s – and largely reconfigured - by Nelson.

The organ was awarded Historic Organ Certificate (Grade 2) by BIOS in 2011. However, this building is one of rotting and ragged splendour. Damp and water ingress mean that the interior is falling apart – indeed the nave has now been completely netted and scaffolded.

In order to use the organ regularly, it would require a full restoration and re-decoration, which might run to at least £280,000.

This church is part of our annual fundraising appeal for the coming twelve months as we hope to stabilise the fabric and create a community space. A decision has been made to remove and rehome the organ.

However, it's not all doom and gloom – far from it.



1860s Lewis organ at Christ the Consoler, Skelton-cum-Newby, North Yorkshire

Many of our organs are well used and well-maintained – for instance, Bristol St John's has a full booking schedule, the Grade I listed 1795 organ by the Gray Brothers of London at St Swithun's, Worcester is beloved of the local Friends group, who arrange weekly organ

recitals and students from the College of Music, Leeds play the organ at St John's, Leeds every two weeks or so.

We rely almost entirely on Friends groups and volunteers to use – and crucially raise the funds to maintain organs. However, we do have community fundraisers in place who can help local groups raise this money.

Many volunteers see organs as being a real way to engage new and existing people. For instance, at St Lawrence's, Broughton, the first fundraising project for the Friends of St Lawrence was to raise enough money to have the organ repaired and working again and this was achieved in late 2013. Since then, the Friends of St Lawrence have funded occasional maintenance to keep the organ working but further significant restoration and repair is needed for long term viability. The estimated cost of this is in the region of £25,000. We have similar fundraising projects ongoing at places such as St Nicholas's, Kings Lynn.

We have undertaken organ restoration projects, but again, they are grassroots driven – and funded – projects. One example is St John's, Chichester. In 1980 following an outbreak of dry rot the organ loft was demolished, rather than repair. To facilitate this the organ was partly dismantled. The original Georgian pipe-work was carefully stored in a packing case.

The solution was to rebuild the organ to its 1813 specification, creating a new case and frame and locating the organ in the east gallery.

CCT has about 2,000 volunteers – people volunteer for all sorts of reason and some dedicate themselves to maintaining our organs. One example is Victor Saville – Victor brings a long history of professional knowledge and skills to help care for our organs. He has restored and tuned CCT organs for over 48 years. It is the skills and goodwill of people like Victor and our volunteers that keep our organs alive.

To conclude, funds are always sparse and we are always prioritising. However, we completely appreciate the importance of these majestic instruments.

What I would like to gain from today is - are organs relevant to a modern age? Are they doomed to become historic relics? What can we do, collectively, to avoid this fate?

Rachel Morley